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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 000714

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV
COMMERCE FOR ITA JEAN KELLY
USPACOM FOR FPA

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SUBJECT: VIEWS FROM THE THREE RING NATIONAL CONVENTION

REF: RANGOON 637 AND PREVIOUS

CLASSIFIED BY: DCM RON MCMULLEN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B,D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: AFTER A THREE WEEK LOCKDOWN AT THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION, 700 DELEGATES GOT A WEEKEND PASS FOR JUNE 5-6. DESPITE THIS RELEASE, NEWS FROM NYAUNG HNA PIN HAS BEEN SCARCE. SOME SECOND AND THIRD-HAND TALES HAVE BEEN TRICKLING OUT ATTESTING TO THE FARCICAL AND PRE-ORDAINED NATURE OF THE EVENT. THE ANECDOTES DON'T SHOWER MUCH GLORY ON THE REGIME OR THE CONSTITUTIONAL DELEGATES. THERE ARE PERSISTENT RUMORS THAT SOME OF THE CEASE-FIRE GROUPS WILL HOLD OUT FOR "REAL REFORM." HOWEVER, WE SEE LITTLE CHANCE THAT THESE GROUPS WILL GIVE UP THEIR CURRENT ECONOMIC BIRD IN THE HAND. IN ANY EVENT, IT'S UNLIKELY THE SPDC WILL GIVE THESE GROUPS THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE ANY MEANINGFUL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CONVENTION PROCESS. END SUMMARY.

TALES OUT OF SCHOOL

12. (C) PAGING JAMES MADISON: THE SPDC ORDERED A PRESTIGIOUS BURMESE EX-AMBASSADOR TO THE CONVENTION SITE TO ADD SOME GRAVITAS TO THE EARLY PROCEEDINGS. WHEN SUBSEQUENTLY RELEASED FROM DUTY, HE COMPLAINED TO A FRIEND THAT THE DELEGATES THE SPDC HAND-SELECTED WERE "RUFFIANS," WITH NO POLITICAL SAVVY OR SERIOUS UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES.

-- (C) THE LIVING IS EASY, PART 1: ONE ETHNIC KARENNI DELEGATE CONTACTED HIS FRIEND DESPERATELY ASKING FOR ONE MILLION KYAT (ABOUT US\$1,100). THOUGH HE HAD COME TO THE CONVENTION WITH A FAT ROLL OF CASH, THE REPRESENTATIVE HAD SPENT IT ALL GAMBLING WITH FELLOW DELEGATES AND TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE ENTERTAINMENT -- MASSAGES, KARAOKE, SHOPPING -- SET UP ON-SITE BY THE REGIME TO MOLLIFY THE CAPTIVES. THE DELEGATE HAD ALSO ASKED FOR A SHIPMENT OF 30 GAMEBOYS, "TO PASS THE TIME WHILE ALL THOSE OTHERS ARE TALKING AND TALKING."

-- (C) THE LIVING IS EASY, PART 2: RUMOR HAS IT THAT LEGIONS OF YOUNG FEMALE "ASSISTANTS" HAVE BEEN SHIPPED TO THE CONVENTION SITE TO PROVIDE EXTRACURRICULAR SERVICES TO THE WEARY DELEGATES.

-- (C) LOOK AND SIGN: ONE ETHNIC DELEGATE COMPLAINED TO HIS FRIEND THAT THE ATTENDANT GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAD MADE IT CLEAR THAT THE DELEGATES WERE NOT EXPECTED TO DISCUSS OR CONTRIBUTE BUT MERELY TO "HTAUK PI HTOU" ("REVIEW AND SIGN") THE FINAL, PRE-COOKED DOCUMENTS ULTIMATELY PRESENTED THEM.

COMMENT: A BIRD IN THE HAND

13. (C) RUMORS PERSIST THAT SOME OF THE BETTER ORGANIZED CEASE-FIRE POLITICAL GROUPS, SUCH AS THE KACHIN INDEPENDENCE ORGANIZATION, WILL HOLD OUT AT THE CONVENTION FOR SOME REAL REFORM. THERE WAS EVEN SOME HOPE, UNREALIZED, THAT SOME OF THE ETHNIC DELEGATES WOULD REFUSE TO RETURN TO THE CONVENTION AFTER THEIR WEEKEND GETAWAY. SUPPOSEDLY THESE GROUPS ARE GETTING PRESSURE TO DELIVER WHAT THEY'D BEEN PROMISING SINCE THEIR RESPECTIVE CEASE-FIRES -- SOME MEASURE OF AUTONOMY.

14. (C) WE THINK THESE RUMORS WILL REMAIN JUST THAT SINCE THE CEASE-FIRE GROUPS ARE UNLIKELY TO BREAK WITH THE SPDC, AND RISK LOSING ECONOMIC BENEFITS THEY RECEIVE FROM THE REGIME, OVER THE HYPOTHETICAL POLITICAL FORM OF A FUTURE BURMA. UNLESS THEY'RE WILLING TO RESUME FIGHTING THE GOVERNMENT THE CEASE-FIRE GROUPS HAVE LITTLE LEVERAGE WITH AN SPDC THAT IS FIRMLY IN CONTROL OF THE NC. HOWEVER, CEASE-FIRE GROUPS HAVE ADMITTED THEY AREN'T PREPARING FOR A RETURN TO ARMED CONFLICT, SO IT IS LIKELY THEY WILL ACCEPT WHATEVER THE SPDC HANDS THEM AT THE CONVENTION. END COMMENT.
MARTINEZ